

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7692

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 6058

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, MILI, AR

SUBJECT: ARMY AND POLICE DESTROY ERP GROUP IN CATAMARCA

REF BA 6023

1. SUMMARY. PROVINCIAL POLICE WITH HELP FROM FEDERAL POLICE AND ARMY TROOPS ENGAGED AND KILLED 17 OF THE ERP COMMANDOS THAT HAD PARTICIPATED IN THE ABORTIVE RAID ON THE 17TH AIRBORNE REGIMENT. THIS ACTION IS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ANTI TERRORIST OPERATION EVER UNDERTAKEN BY GOA SECURITY FORCES. END SUMMARY

2. DURING THE COURSE OF MONDAY, AUG 12, PROVINCIAL POLICE, AIDED BY UNITS OF THE FEDERAL POLICE AND ARMY TROOPS, SEARCHED THE AREA AROUND CATAMARCA FOR FUGITIVES FROM SUNDAY'S ABORTIVE RAID AGAINST THE 17TH AIRBORNE REGIMENT. APPROXIMATELY 15 MILES NORTH OF CATAMARCA NEAR A SMALL VILLAGE JUST OFF ROUTE 62, LOCAL RESIDENTS TOLD POLICE THAT TWO YOUTHS HAD PURCHASED SEVEN KILOS OF BREAD. THEIR SUSPICIONS AROUSED, THE POLICE IMMEDIATELY BEGAN A SEARCH OF THE AREA AND QUICKLY ENCOUNTERED THE ERP FORCES. WHILE LOCAL POLICE
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CORDONED OFF THE AREA, FEDERAL POLICE AND ARMY TROOPS OF

THE 17TH AIRBORNE REGIMENT RUSHED TO THE AREA. THE ARMY TROOPS, LED BY COL CUBAS, ACTUALLY ENGAGED THE GUERILLAS AND, USING MORTAR AND AUTOMATIC WEAPON FIRE, KILLED THE 17 TERRORISTS. TOGETHER WITH THE THREE ERP KILLED IN CORDOBA AND THE 15 PLUS CAPTURED IN CATAMARCA, ERP ATTACKS OVER THE WEEKEND MUST DESPITE SUCCESS OF VILLA MARIA RAID BE SEEN AS VERY SERIOUS FAILURE.

3. ARMY SOURCES ARE DESCRIBED BY DAO AS BEING VERY PLEASED OVER THE OUTCOME OF THE CATAMARCA INCIDENT, BOTH MILITARILY AND POLITICALLY. AS REPORTS OF THE FIREFIGHT REACHED BUENOS AIRES LATE ON AFTERNOON OF THE 12TH, MANY ARMY OFFICERS FEARED GOA MIGHT FAIL TO BACK COL CUBAS WHO HAD TAKEN INITIATIVE IN ENGAGING THE ERP WITHOUT EXPLICIT ORDERS. HOWEVER, WHEN DEFMIN ROBLEDO DESCRIBED ARMY ACTION A SPECIAL CASE NECESSITATED BY UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES AND HAVING FULL CIVILIAN BACKING, MILITARY MOOD BECAME JUBILANT.

4. DAO SOURCES SAY THAT WHILE COL CUBAS AND HIS TROOPS PLAYED KEY ROLE IN ACTION, ARMY WILL TRY TO GIVE BULK OF CREDIT FOR OPERATION TO POLICE. FOR POLITICAL REASONS, MILITARY DOES NOT WISH TO BE SEEN AS HAVING PLAYED OVERLY LARGE ROLE IN INCIDENT. ARMY, OF COURSE, EXPECTS ERP TO RESPOND WITH SOME SORT OF SPECTACULAR AGAINST MILITARY TO OFFSET CATAMARCA REVERSAL. THE HUGE MILITARY COMPLEX IN THE BA SUBURB OF BELGRANO IS CONSIDERED A LIKELY TARGET AND HAS BEEN PUT ON STATE OF ALERT. IN ADDITION, ALL FEDERAL POLICE AND FIRE-FIGHTING UNITS ARE ALSO ON ALERT.

5. COMMENT. BIG QUESTION NOW IS WHETHER ERP WHICH SEEMED TO BE ON VERGE OF SHIFTING FROM SMALL UNIT RAIDS TO MAJOR COMBINED OPERATIONS WILL LIE LOW AND LICK WOUNDS OR ATTEMPT LARGER OPERATIONS IN HOPES OF REESTABLISHING "INVULNERABILITY" MYTH.
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